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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000702

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2015

TAGS: PREL PGOV SMIG PHUM PARM SOCI KDEM LO

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP, AUGUST 2005

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 606

1B. 04 BRATISLAVA 151

1C. STATE 131485

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

ARMS DEALER: U.S. EMBASSY MUST APPROVE OUR EXPORTS(!)

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11. (C) During a meeting with Cino Straka, a former Slovak arms dealer, Poloffs learned of a erroneous (yet perhaps auspicious) piece of misinformation: the assumption by this arms dealer that all exports of Slovak manufactured military hardware must be approved by the United States Embassy in Bratislava. Straka told us that during his proposed export of tank replacement parts and supplies to Libya early last year (ref B), he learned of the "requirement" to clear all Slovak manufactured military equipment and parts through the U.S. Embassy, which he said arose from a 1999 agreement between the GOS and the then-U.S. Ambassador. When the Embassy advised him against transferring the tank equipment to Libya, he indeed called the deal off, though he told us that he is not sure such a "requirement" will stand if Robert Fico -- a friend of Straka's -- becomes Prime Minister next year.

HZDS BEING CORDIAL WITH COALITION TO WIN OVER THE U.S.?

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12. (C) During an August 22 meeting, HZDS party leader (and frequent Meciar emissary to the Embassy) Milan Urbani told us that he met with Prime Minister Dzurinda on August 20 to discuss the political situation in light of the "crisis" surrounding Pavol Rusko. Urbani told us that HZDS had decided not to join the coalition if offered, but that HZDS would not "gang up" on Dzurinda (Note: Though Urbani told us that HZDS would not support early elections, five days later the press reported that party Vice Chairman Viliam Veteska was supporting early elections, calling the coalition "Slovakia's misfortune"). Urbani told us that HZDS had made the decision to play nice with the coalition because HZDS wants "good relations" with the United States. Urbani further asked whether he could meet with recently-arrived Ambassador, to discuss a possible future meeting between the Ambassador and HZDS Chairman Vladimir Meciar. PolEcon Chief explained that the Ambassador would be meeting with small groups of leaders from all major political parties, including HZDS, but that meeting would not include Meciar at this time.

SLOVAK FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AMENDED

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13. (C) Slovak NGO representatives have criticized the Slovak version of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which was passed in 2001 in an attempt to add to Slovakia's anti-corruption "tool kit." Under the 2001 act, "personal data" was protected from release, and many government agencies and officials -- especially at regional and local levels -- found this an excuse to protect information about everything from the number of employees in their offices, to the particulars of their publicly-funded salaries. NGO communities felt it was a major barrier to transparency. The media have been unanimously critical of politicians/officials' reluctance to provide such information.

14. (SBU) On August 24, the GOS approved the proposal of a draft amendment to the FOIA that would make the law more clear, and insure that salaries of regional and local officials will not be concealed. The proposed amendment -- which will now be sent to the parliament for discussion and a vote -- calls for information from meetings of city and regional councils to be more readily available, and the sales of real estate owned by local, regional, and central government entities to be made more transparent. While in the past doubt has been cast on the legitimacy of some officials' real estate holdings, the new amendment would mandate that the names of those who acquired the property from the government be made public. NGOs provided extensive public comment on the amendment, and their suggestions were widely accepted by the Ministry of Justice. NGO Alliance for Fair Play issued a statement declaring its satisfaction with the law, but noted that it will be closely monitoring the legislative debate in parliament to see if MPs try to weaken

the amendment.

UNHCR: SLOVAKS NOT VERY OPEN TO REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

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15. (C) Pierfrancesco Maria Natta, the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Bratislava, told Poloff that he raised the issue of Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan (ref C) with MFA State Secretary Magda Vasaryova during the visit of the new UNHCR Director for Europe. Natta expressed regret -- but not surprise -- that Slovakia, whose refugee centers are "quite empty" at the moment due to a decrease in the number of migrants and refugees transiting Slovakia, preferred a "burden sharing" approach that they said should be worked out with other EU countries. Not able to wait for Slovakia, UNHCR accepted an offer from Romania to take 452 Uzbek refugees for six months.

VALLEE

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